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## Barbed wires split devotees at this dargah

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**STAVAN DESAI**

Posted: Mar 17, 2003 at 0000 hrs IST

**AHMEDABAD, MARCH 16:**

It was once a symbol of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. But today, the 600-year-old dargah of Sufi Saint Imam Shah Baba in Pirana is a place of conflict. This Muslim saint had a large Hindu following. And the amity between the devotees was famous. But now they are fighting to get a hold on the management.

Tempers are still running high after a stone-pelting incident two months ago at the dargah. The bone of contention being the management of the Imam Shah Maharaj Trust and the seat of the Sufi saint.

While the Satpanthis — Hindu followers of the Satpanth sect propagated by the Sufi saint himself — favour Acharyashree Nanakdasji Maharaj, the present heir of the seat, the Shahdads who claim to be descendants of the saint, favour Pachchamji Karsan, another leader of the sect.

The bickering has risen to such a level that when Muslims in Ahmedabad took out the tazia procession in all its traditional splendour recently, Muslim residents in Pirana were forced to restrict it to a lacklustre affair. The Shahdads were not even allowed to enter the dargah with the tazia from the traditional route as it has been sealed with barbed wires.

"We have not stopped them from entering the dargah. They can enter through the main gate just as other followers do. However, they cannot approach from the other side as the stone-pelting incident happened there," says Acharyashree Nanakdasji Maharaj.

"The other side of the compound was sealed after a resolution was passed by the trustees. It's not that Muslims cannot offer prayers here but no nuisance will be allowed," he adds.

The Shahdads had, earlier in the week, made a representation before District Collector Sunaina Tomar alleging that the traditional route taken by the tazia procession from the Imamwada had been sealed and they had been asked not to enter the dargah premises.

The Collector had then asked SP, Ahmedabad Rural, R.B. Bhrambhatt to ensure proper security arrangements. "Traditionally, we take the tazia from the Imamwada and through the dargah.

Though there were police personnel at the place and the SP did ask me if we wanted the fence to be removed, I was apprehensive and decided that the tazia would remain in the Imamwada," says trustee Naimuddin Bademian Saiyed. There are 11 trustees — eight Hindus and three Muslims.

Saiyed adds: "After the stone-pelting incident two months ago, the Satpanthis removed the Quran and also destroyed the tomb of Tassaddak Hussain."

However, the Satpanthis say they have always adopted the policy of non-violence. Another reason which has given rise to conflict is the adoption of the Navi Puja Vidhi in 1991, a new method of offering prayers at the dargah. According to the Shahdads, the verses of the Quran were recited before the new vidhi was adopted. But now aarti is done and prayers are offered in the Hindu style. But, Satpanthis say that is how prayers have always been offered.

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